[For the SPECTATOR]

To the Business Men of Staunton.

The writer of this communication has been pained, and we may add surprised to see from the city papers that the Common Council permits in its purpose to establish a street-railway in Staunton. He does not question the purity of the motives of that body—on the contrary he commends the *zeal* with which they prosecute an enterprise which they, doubtless, believe will tend to promote the interests of the city. But he believes, on the other hand, that they are mistaken, and that they are about to inflict on the city, and its business, an injury which can hardly be overestimated. He, therefore, claims the right of a citizen to remonstrate against a measure so full of evil.

Staunton is now in a prosperous condition. The public institutions located here—the four large female schools, the male schools, the commercial college, the Insurance Companies, and other institutions and factories bring a large amount of money to the city, which stimulates enterprise and industries and adds to its population. For several years past, there has been a growing tendency to centralize the commercial business of the great county of Augusta and many of the surrounding counties, in Staunton—our narrow streets are therefore generally crowded with wagons, carts and other vehicles, loading and unloading the commodities which are being brought and sold here. The wives of our farmers flock to town in their carriages to do their shopping and make sale of the smaller productions of their homesteads. This condition of things gives life and activity to our streets. Wagons and carriages stand daily in front of every place of business. It is often difficult for a person in any kind of vehicle to thread his way through the jam which obstructs the highways. If any man will take his stand at the intersection of Main and Augusta streets, which may be called the centre of business, he will see how dense is the throng of people and vehicles which crowd the narrow streets, especially on Court and other public days and be impressed with the insufficiency of the space available for ordinary business purposes.

The streets of Staunton are but 42 feet wide—of this limited space, seven feet on each side is dedicated to side-walks or pavements for foot-passengers, leaving but 18 feet—(two feet less than the width of an ordinary country road)—for the use of vehicles and the loading and unloading of merchandise.

Yet, in the face of all these facts, it is proposed to grant more than *one-third of this insufficient space* to a speculative corporation by giving to it priority of right-of way!

The railway will occupy about 10 feet of the 28 feet dedicated to vehicles. If the tracks are laid in *the middle* of the street there will be a pass-way of only 9 feet on each side of track! Thus it will be impossible for any two vehicles to pass each other going, either in the same or opposite directions. Now if a wagon load of hay or forage, or furniture, which usually projects some distance beyond the side of the vehicle conveying it, should happen to meet a street car it must either encroach on the rights of the car company or run the risk of sweeping passengers from the sidewalks!

Wagons will not be allowed to stop long enough before a store to load or unload, because it would obstruct the passage of other vehicles. Carriages could not, for similar reasons, remain long enough before a dry goods store to enable a lady to select a dress or a cloak. Nor could the wife or daughter of a farmer be allowed to delay before a grocery store to trade her butter and eggs for an equivalent in groceries!

What will be the practical results of this condition of affairs? In the judgment of the writer it will be a rapid decline in the business. The elegant dry goods stores, extending from Hart's Bazaar to Loeb's corner, will be comparatively deserted. Ladies, when they drive up to a store to attend to their shopping and take their purchases with them, will not be pleased to receive the admonition of the Policeman, "Drive on! you are obstructing the highway!"

The grocers and dealers in provisions will find from similar causes their business rapidly passing away from them. Owners of business-houses will find their rents declining. The number of licenses will be lessened, the revenues of the city will be diminished, and a general stagnation of business will ensue.—Country stores will multiply, where no such improvements to trade exist, and where the wives and daughters of our farmers can ride to the stores and hitch their horses, and trade or barter at their leisure and without interference of police officers.

The street cars, to be of any value, must move *rapidly*, and as our streets are narrow and the squares or blocks of the city (only two acres each) the crossings will be numerous, and the danger of collisions and other accidents will be very great.

The next question is, what benefit is to arise to the public, to compensate for these evils? If there be any point within the corporation limits which is *half a mile distant* from the business centre of the city, it is unknown to the writer. What need is there for such an improvement? Who will patronize it? It looks to the writer as if the charter were a mere speculative affair. He can see no reason why business men should invest in it. But the city may, by indiscreet legislation, be involved in obligations, from which it will find it impossible to obtain a release except by payment of a large sum of money.

Grave doubts have been expressed, as to the right of common council to grant such a franchise. The *streets* of a city belong, not to the city, but to the *State*, and the *State Legislature* only is competent to grant the charter. The writer is not prepared to express any opinion on this question as he has not investigated it. But he has a decided opinion that the City Council has acted hastily and unadvisedly in a matter of so much importance without taking measures to inform itself of the wishes of the people on the subject. The Council doubtless believe that the measure is a wise and beneficent one, while the writer is equally decided in his opinion that it is fraught with evil and disaster! The time has come when the business men of the town should give full and emphatic expression to their sentiments on this subject.

AN OLD CITIZEN.